# SFAUNIVERSITY ANNUALREPORT



During the years 2000 and 2001, SFA University addressed a variety of challenges that focused on learning and performance, both for the organization and for individuals. Resources were devoted to three major areas of change: supporting the transformation of SFA into a performance-based organization; providing learning services to internal and external customers; and improving the quality of our own products and internal processes.

### TRANSFORMATION

As a corporate university, SFA University is dedicated to support the organization in achieving its performance goals. As SFA began to transform itself into a performancebased organization (PBO), SFA University's task in January 2000 was to roll out a three-part curriculum intended to help employees make the transition from a traditional government workplace to a PBO. In partnership with Public Strategies Group (PSG) and Accenture, we introduced everyone in SFA to the concepts and languages of a PBO, teaching them to focus on results rather than process and renewing their emphasis on customer service and customer satisfaction.

"Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time. What we really want is for things to remain the same, but get better."
(Sydney J. Harris)

PBO at the Front Lines began with a pilot in January, followed by sessions for all staff from April through June 2000. This program was unique in several ways:

1) It was the first program that SFA University, operating as a corporate

university, developed and delivered to internal staff rather than to external partners;

- 2) Intact working teams attended together, along with their first-line supervisors; and
- 3) SFA staff members participated as "coaches," to guide each team through

the process.



The objective of this five-part workshop series was to refocus SFA employees on their customers: identifying their

customers, listening to their customers, and developing action plans to satisfy their customers. The participants were introduced to four service standards that would apply in every area of SFA's work and in interaction with customers and coworkers: be worthy of trust, be courteous, deliver great products and services, and be efficient. We learned that the performance of the organization would be measured according to a balanced scorecard that

included customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and reduced unit costs.

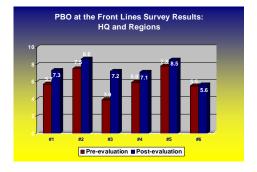
More than 70 front-line teams, along with their immediate supervisors, attended the sessions once a week over a period of five weeks. We also held compressed three-day regional workshops in Chicago, Atlanta, San

	Date	# of People
DC Region	April 18-May 18	
	Tuesdays AM/PM	72/50
	Wednesdays AM/PM	66/68
	Thursdays AM	51
	May 23-June 29	
	Tuesdays AM/PM	69/26
	Wednesdays AM/PM	49/59
	Thursdays AM	70
Chicago	May 9, 23; June 13	92
Atlanta	May 11, 25; June 15	89
San Francisco	May 17; June 7, 21	89
Denver	June 27, 28, 29	109
Washington D.C.		
(Regions 1,2,3)	May 31; June 1, 2	97

Francisco, and Denver; and added a three-day workshop in Washington, D.C. for the New York, Boston and Philadelphia regions.

A primary purpose of this course was to give staff a fundamental understanding of the PBO. Participants were asked to rate their knowledge about the PBO on a scale of 1 to 10, describing how well they understood the concepts. The questions addressed their understanding of how a PBO was different from a traditional government

organization, who their immediate customers were, the performance excellence formula and balanced scorecard, and why SFA became a PBO. The following chart shows how staff rated their understanding of PBO concepts before and after attending the course.



SFA Traditions was the second course in the PBO curriculum. It built on the concepts introduced in Front Lines, and also encouraged employees to take pride in the history and heritage of student aid from its beginnings in 1860 through the present day. Traditions reinforced and renewed our connection with SFA's mission: "We help put America through school." The one-day course provided an interactive experience that focused on who we are, what our mission is, and how we accomplish our mission. Through activities and videos, the participants shared some of the hopes and dreams that students have about college, and listened to stories about how financial aid affected the students' lives.

"Employees need to hear and understand how their job impacts other people's lives. The history part was great. I definitely feel even more proud to be part of SFA and 'helping put America through school.'"
(Traditions participant)



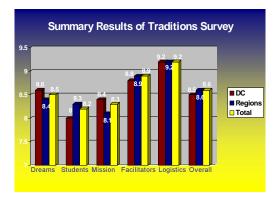
"It gave me an understanding of our mission. I have a better concept of the PBO now. I'm ready to go back to my office and help educate America."

(Traditions participant)

To evaluate whether the course achieved its purpose, we asked the participants to answer six questions about their understanding of and connection with the mission, understanding of the students' experience, and the effectiveness of the facilitation team, the logistics coordinator, and the course as a whole. The chart below summarizes the results:

"Everyone in SFA should have a thorough grounding in the nuts and bolts of the process. Every new employee should receive it, there should be annual refreshers."

(Traditions participant)



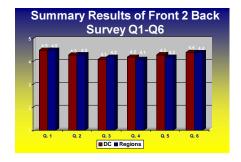
"It was great being in this interactive session with SFA and operating partners. It helped me understand what others do and their perspectives. Will help us work effectively together. Very beneficial."

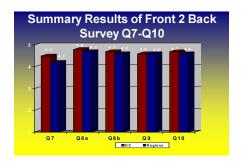
(SFA Operating Partner)

Student Aid Front 2 Back was the final course. It was the most ambitious of the three courses, and included operating partners as participants and co-trainers along with SFA staff. The course objective was to give everyone—staff and operating partners—a common perspective on the student aid process. Ideally everyone who works in student aid would have a shared sense of mission, values, and commitment to the customer no matter what their job or position might be in the service delivery chain.

Front 2 Back was a one-day program that was attended by more than 3850 individuals: 1250 at SFA sites and 2600 at our operating partners' sites.

Participants in the *Front 2 Back* course evaluated their experience by rating their prior knowledge of student aid, the overall effectiveness of the course content (Q1 - Q6), the effectiveness of the activities (Q7), and the quality of the facilitation team (Q8a, 8b, and Q9) and logistics coordinators (Q10).





### LEARNING & PERFORMANCE

SFA University's goal is to serve as a one-stop resource for meaningful and quality courses and services to our internal customers, SFA managers, staff and operating partners; and to our external customers, who are school financial aid administrators. We provide learning to meet the needs of the entire organization, for example, in the three courses developed to support PBO transformation, and we also provide learning services to individuals.

"The ability of an organization to learn is its source of competitive advantage." — Senge

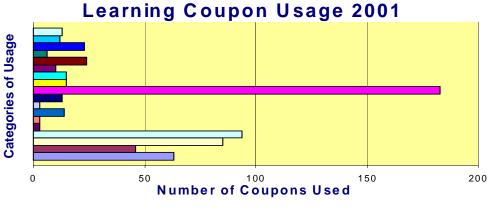
#### **INTERNAL CUSTOMERS**

#### **Learning Coupon**

The Learning Coupon program provides each individual in SFA with \$500 that can be used to purchase outside training to enhance performance or job skills. The University began this program as a pilot in 1999 and continued it in 2000 as a permanent benefit available to every SFA employee. The training purchased with the

Learning Coupon must be work-related and approved by the supervisor. The \$500 account can be combined with other funds from the employee's channel/unit for more costly activities, or it can be used in smaller amounts for several different learning activities, including the purchase of books or training videos.

In 2000, 38% of SFA staff (412 people) used their Learning Coupon, and in 2001 usage increased to 50% (590 people).



This chart shows the number of Learning Coupons used in 2001 and the areas in which staff used them.

■ Administration/Business Accounting/Finance/Budget Communication □ Conferences ■ Distance Learning Contractual ■ Foreign Language ■ Government/Law ■ Human Resource □ IT Leadership ■ Management Development ■ Performance Measurement ■ Program Management Analysis Retirement ■ Self Development Training/Instructional Design Other

#### **Career Zone**

The Career Zone (CZ) is an investment in SFA staff. It is a safe and inviting place, operating within the SFA standards framework and dedicated to responding to the needs of all SFA staff. SFA University and SFA Human Resources are joint sponsors of the project, which was launched in October 2001. The CZ is a virtual space that allows all employees to access resources through an Intranet site, although the zone will become a physical space in the Washington, DC building at Union Center Plaza. After its initial rollout in Washington DC, the CZ message was carried to the regional offices using storyboard presentations and Q&A sessions between October and December 2001.

To date, CZ has offered a series of "skill exchanges" that are available to all SFA staff. These two-hour programs are presented by an SFA employee or operating partner. The CZ also sponsors "Learning Labs," which are one-day to three-day courses taught by internal staff or by outside vendors. Courses included: *Presentation Skills for the Occasional Presenter, Retirement* 

The future vision for the CZ includes career counseling and a knowledge

Planning, and Navigating the Internet.

network that will facilitate knowledge sharing throughout the organization.

### **SFA Managers Excellence**

Managers are key to the transformation effort and SFA University offered specialized training on PBO concepts and best practices to SFA managers. While the front-line teams attended *PBO at the Front Lines*, managers attended several sessions that introduced the same concepts and showed them how to support their front-line teams. From June to September 2000, nearly all of SFA's 200 managers, along with operating partners, attended the Disney Institute for a cutomized, intensive benchmarking experience in customer service and performance excellence.

Beginning in Fall 2001, managers are being offered a variety of training events on performance accountability combined with individualized learning and support services. The managers' program is designed to help them achieve increasingly challenging performance goals and to provide them with just-in-time support in a dynamic work environment. SFA University and PSG are developing a menu of services for managers that will include courses, individualized coaching, small-group training, and safe practice fields to apply new skills.



#### **EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS**

#### **Financial Aid Administrators**

SFA University provides training to financial aid professionals in the more than 6000 colleges and universities that participate in the Title IV student aid programs. These courses are intended



to support financial aid professionals in understanding and applying the complex rules and procedures for awarding and disbursing student aid.

Throughout 2000 and 2001, multiple workshops were offered nationwide to convey the most current Department of Education information on student aid policies and programs. Courses included hands-on training in procedures that Financial Aid Administrators (FAAs) need to understand in order to manage their own work and performance in complying with program requirements.

All SFA courses offered to the financial aid community are free. An FAA can learn about available training by visiting

the SFA University web site or through the IFAP web site or Schools Portal that link to our registration system. These training programs are developed under two contracts administered by SFA University and are managed by project teams consisting of staff from SFAU and the Schools Channel. The classroomstyle training is delivered by SFAU's regional training officers and by Schools Channel staff: Client Account Managers and Institutional Improvement Specialists.

The national programs offered are as follows:

### Precertification Training (also known as Basic Training)

Basic financial aid responsibilities for schools, required by law for all new schools seeking to participate in the Title IV programs.

New Financial Aid Administrator Training
Similar content to Precertification
Training, designed for financial aid staff
with little or no previous experience in
managing the student aid programs.



"Never treat your audience as customers, always as partners." —Jimmy Stewart

Pictured are Deborah Tarpley and Skip Pou, Training Officers from the Denver and Atlanta regions.

### Pell/Recipient Financial Management System (RFMS) Training (2000)

Demonstration of the new electronic system for requesting and disbursing Pell Grant funds. The training introduced the RFMS system.

### Spring (Reauthorization) Training

Explaining the changes and new regulations that resulted from the 1998 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

### **Direct Loan Accounting**

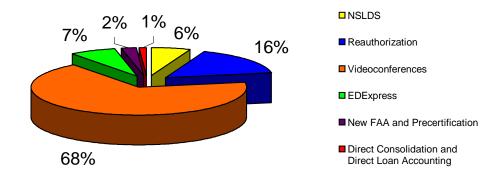
Introduces participants to the conceptual and practical skills necessary to meet Direct Loan reconciliation requirements.

#### **Direct Consolidation Loan Training**

Explains the concepts, processes, and procedures for consolidating student loans into a Direct Consolidated Loan.

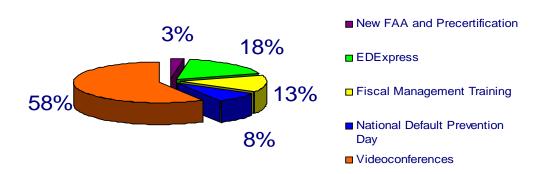
This chart shows SFA University national trainings, the number of workshops, and the number of participants in 2000.

### SFA UNIVERSITY TRAINING 2000



3 Workshops	22033 Participants
105 Workshops	5378 Participants
119 Workshops	2303 Participants
64 Workshops	1882 Participants
10 Workshops	685 Participants
27 Workshops	362 Participants
21 Workshops	N/A
	105 Workshops 119 Workshops 64 Workshops 10 Workshops 27 Workshops

### SFA UNIVERSITY TRAINING 2001



This chart shows SFA University national trainings, the number of workshops, and the number of participants in 2001.

Videoconferences EDExpress Fiscal Management National Default Prevention Day New FAA and Precertification 3 Workshops 244 Workshops 74 Workshops 12 Workshops 8 Workshops 9710 Participants 2927 Participants 2231 Participants 1373 Participants 434 Participants

### **Direct Loan Basic Training**

An overview of Direct Loans for new schools and in-depth training for those schools already participating in the program.

### Application Processing/Packaging

A how-to on transmitting and receiving application data and packaging student aid awards using the EDExpress software.

### NSLDS (National Student Loan Data System) Training

An overview of the system and functions of NSLDS, with a focus on how to resolve conflicting data.

### Fiscal Officer/Fiscal Management Training (2001)

Semi-annual training for fiscal and business officers responsible for managing, delivering, and reporting on student aid funds.





#### **OPERATING PARTNERS**

The organization's relationship with its operating partners has changed and continues to move toward a more seamless integration of activities. Most project teams include both SFA and operating partner staff, and many of SFA University's projects have been developed as joint efforts. The development and delivery of Student Aid Front 2 Back was the most complex example of this new working model. At sessions held in Washington, DC, operating partners attended side by side with SFA employees. Many sessions were facilitated by mixed teams of SFA and partner staff. Some SFA trainers delivered sessions at the operating partner call centers.

### LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

#### **SFA COACH**

The University began exploring alternative formats to traditional classroom training with SFA COACH, a 36-hour interactive, self-paced program that teaches the basics of the student aid programs. COACH was introduced to the aid community in 2000 as a computer-based training program and has been very successful. Currently SFAU has converted COACH to a web format so that FAAs can access the sessions online without needing to download and install software.



### Front 2 Back on the Web

Following the classroom sessions for *Student Aid* 

Front 2 Back, a team composed of staff from SFA University and SFA CIO developed the web version of the class, Front 2 Back on the Web, which went live in September 2001. This "web tool" introduced an alternative way to deliver course content outside the traditional classroom. It also provided an opportunity for employees on the development team to apply their skills and capabilities to new projects.

#### **Videoconferences**

For the past three years, the videoconference format has become another vehicle for training delivery. In 2000, we broadcast three videoconferences on student aid topics.

January 20, 2000: "Applying for Federal Aid—It's Easier Than You Think" gave basic information on how to apply for student aid and was aimed at high school and TRIO guidance counselors. The audience was approximately 151 schools and about 3500 viewers.

October 26, 2000: "Getting Connected for the New Millennium: 2001-2002 Application and Delivery System Updates" covered changes to the delivery system. Over 450 schools, representing 7000 viewers participated.

<u>December 7, 2000</u>: "Applying for Federal Student Aid: It's Free, Fast, and Easy" was the 2001-2002 videoconference for high school and TRIO counselors. It was also available through web casting and reached 500 schools and nearly 10,000 viewers.

In 2001, we produced two videoconferences, which were also available through web casting.

November 1, 2001: "Access for All: 2002-03 Application Processing System Update" covered changes to the delivery system. The audience was approximately 439 schools and about 5469 viewers.

<u>December 6, 2001</u>: "Applying for 2002-03 Federal Student Aid: We'll Show You How" was the 2002-03 videoconference for high school and TRIO counselors. Over 175 schools representing 4200 viewers participated.



### IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

As a corporate university our goal is to provide best-in-business learning services and products to our customers. We took several important steps toward improving the quality of our products and internal processes during 2000 and 2001.

### **POLISHED TRAINING**

With PSG supporting the effort, we changed the way that we develop and deliver training. We helped full-time trainers polish their delivery skills through a new course titled *The SFAU Approach to Training Development and Delivery.* This course teaches five "keys" or standards for measuring the effectiveness of training: it should be relevant, interactive, engaging, polished, and supported.

Two project teams applied these standards with dramatic effect in two of our most basic, long-standing Title IV training programs. Precertification

Training and Fiscal Management Training were redesigned to be more interactive and less dependent on lecture as a training tool. The trainers learned new techniques to polish their delivery and engage the audience. The University staff also tried to improve the learning environment by using inexpensive giveaways as rewards to encourage participation, and by incorporating

more activities and exercises into the training materials.

The University convened a Training Process Improvement Team to analyze methods to improve the way that training projects are developed from conception through final evalution. A model of "Plan, Design, Build, Deliver, Assess," served as a customized project management tool that can be used by any SFA project team to consistently create training programs that meet the needs of their customers.

As a foundation for efforts to reduce unit cost, another team worked with Accenture to develop a cost model that would capture and track all costs associated with SFA University's training projects. The cost analysis tool is scheduled for completion in 2002. It will provide the University with complete and accurate data to improve budgeting and contracting activities, and thereby improve our internal financial controls.

#### **EXPERT LOGISTICS**

University Services teams have been deeply involved in discovering ways to create the best learning environment.

All SFA University courses are supported by the service teams, who expanded their roles to become "logistics coordinators" during SFA Traditions. The Traditions sessions were sometimes held in hotel facilities and included lunch service as well as the use of audio-visual equipment, music, games, giveaways, and many items that required advance setup work.

To handle the operation, the University recruited coordinators from other units in SFA and gave the group special training in logistics.

The meaning of "logistics support" grew from simply organizing the mailout of training materials to a much larger role. The coordinator's function expanded to include handling all the details of locating and setting up the classroom, equipment, materials, nametags, certificates, and any special items pertaining to a particular training program. After preparing the classroom, the coordinator remained onsite as a problem solver throughout the course of the training.

### **IMPROVED REGISTRATION**

SFA University is committed to improve the process by which people register for training, receive confirmations, reminders, and travel and hotel information. SFA University began working in 2000 to acquire a

sophisticated
Learning
Management
System (LMS) that
would replace a
system that no
longer served our
needs. A team of
SFA and Accenture
staff pursued this

project through requirements development, funding, bidding, and vendor selection. The future vision for SFA University's LMS is to handle registration for all SFA training and conferences as well as provide personalized service, messaging, and transcripts for our external customers.

Pictured is Vicki Wilson, University Services, making sure another training runs smoothly.



### LESSONS LEARNED & CELEBRATION

To make performance matter, SFA University added another step to the performance improvement cycle: assessment

and

celebration upon completion ofimportant projects. **Following** SFA



Traditions and Front 2 Back, we invited all the people who contributed to the training to come back for a day of reflection. We held a debriefing session

about what worked in the training and what needed to be improved; then we finished by acknowledging and celebrating the efforts of everyone who made the project a success. The lessons learned

products and services.



place while in Portals, such as SFA Traditions and Student Aid Front 2 Back.

Pictured is a group of employees from SFA University at the "Bon Voyage" to Portals celebration.

Doug Stormont gets a certificate of

> role in making Front 2 Back a

> > success.

appreciation for his

will be applied to future projects to continually improve the quality of all

We also celebrated our move from one location to another. September of 2001 saw SFA University move from the

> Portals Building in Southwest Washington, DC to the newly built Union Center Plaza **Building in Northeast** Washington, DC. This move allows all of SFA to be in the same location rather than three separate buildings. Before the move, we had one last party to bid farewell to Portals and our

view of the cherry blossoms in bloom. The "Bon Voyage" party was both a goodbye and an opportunity to reminisce about key events that took

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WORDSWORTH, PENNIE SUMMERS, LORRAINE CHANG,

AND ALL THE STAFF OF FSA UNIVERSITY.

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